

HTTYD: Ingrid's Tale

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Summary: The dragon adventures continue as Hiccup and the gang must turn a young dragon hunter, into a dragon trainer... and that's just the half of it.

1. Introduction Stealing Breakfast

Chapter 1: Introduction/Stealing Breakfast

If you had told me two weeks ago that I would be risking my life to save a dragon, I would have called you crazy. But here I am, hanging from a fiery ledge, only seconds away from death. Hmm ... maybe I should start from the beginning.

My name is Ingrid Halstein. I come from a very small mountain village called Derby. It was there, I lived happily with my family until ... well, I'll get into that a little later. For now, let's fast forward a bit to exactly two weeks ago, just before all this started.

It was early dawn, when I awoke to the sweet smell of meat cooking in a village nearby. I'd been camping out in these woods for nearly a month now and couldn't remember the last time I'd eaten. I held my aching stomach as it rumbled. As my hunting traps had come up empty, and dragons regularly roamed the area, food seemed pretty scarce. It was here that I would have to turn to my second option. I put on my cloak and, taking another whiff of the delicious morning air, I slowly and carefully made my way down the hill. As I neared the clearing, I stopped and hid behind a tree. Pulling the hunting knife from my belt, I peeked for any signs of activity, other human bodies or, Oden forbid, dragons! I waited another moment before concluding that the coast was clear. I pulled the hood of my cloak up over my head then swiftly and quietly moved from the tree into the village. This wouldn't be the first time I've had to steal food or supplies and, though I'm not proud of it, I've gotten pretty good at it. Let's just say, I've been on my own for a while. As I moved deeper into the village, I couldn't help but notice its uniqueness. Honestly, I've

never seen anything like it. There was almost a peaceful warmth to it. It almost reminded me of my home village, well ... almost.

I jolted at the sound of a snapping twig, and dove behind the nearest building. My eyes widened at the sight of a Deadly Nadder as it passed. Just then, the dragon stopped, and began sniffing in my direction. I ducked my head back and tried to remain out of sight. The dragon turned the corner, moving closer inward. I held my knife outward, trying to remain in its blind spot for as long as I could. A loud whistle was heard in the distance, causing the beast to whip its head around and turn in the other direction. It disappeared in an excited rush. I heaved a relieved sigh. I was a bit confused however by the behavior. The Nader had responded to that whistle, as if it were a dog being called by its master. This place was getting weirder by the second. Once more, I peeked around the corner and surveyed the area for any other activity, then continued to track my breakfast. By this point, I decided to quicken my pace. The faster I got my food, the faster I could leave this weird village.

Finally, my eyes met with a beautiful sight; meat cooking on a front yard spit! I licked my lips, and inched closer, holding my hands out ready to grab and run. I paused as I began to hear voices from inside the house. The front door creaked open. Without hesitation, I nabbed the sizzling hunk of poultry, and ran as fast as I could to the nearest hiding place. As I slipped into another building, I could hear a gruff male voice shout angrily on behalf of his missing food. I can't say I didn't feel guilty, but when it comes to survival, empathy just isn't something you can afford. I laid low in my hiding place, long enough to finish off the entire bird._ That hit the spot_, I thought to myself while masking a small burp. I sat there against the wall, allowing my now full stomach to settle. I could stay there for a little while at least, as long as whoever lived there didn't catch me. So far, the place seemed pretty vacant. It wasn't even that big. Small cracks in the ceiling let in rays of sunlight, shining over the room's contents. The more I saw, I began to realize that this wasn't someone's home ... it was a shop - belonging to the village blacksmith I would have guessed, based on the weaponry and various tools hanging from the walls and ceiling. Smiling to myself, I decided that maybe now was a good time to stock up on a few supplies before heading on my way.

I snatched up a few more supplies, stuffing them in my cloak before retreating toward the back entrance. I stopped dead in my tracks when I heard a loud rattle, followed by a slow creak. Turning my head, I could see the front door opening. I backed away into a darker corner of the room, trying my best to blend in and keeping as still as humanly possible. The large Viking that entered, who I could only assume was the blacksmith himself, carried with him an armful of burnt and broken shields, which he carelessly tossed into another corner. Then, slapping the dust from his hands, he walked back out, slamming the door behind him. He didn't even seem to notice I was there ... boy, this was turning out to be my lucky day.

I hastily leaped out the back door, hoping I wouldn't meet with any more close calls. I was still feeling pretty full and, on top of that, I had stolen more provisions than I could carry. I could feel myself slowing down. No! I couldn't! I had to get out of there fast. _Come on Ingrid, you've done this several times before_, I urged myself... Yes! I could almost see my camp site ... I was home free!

"Hey you!"

Or not? I felt a harsh tug at the hood of my cloak, holding me in place. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the sneer on his dark bearded face. Spitelout, they called him. I struggled in his grip, but he only grasped tighter, dragging me back to the village. More villagers who were obviously attracted by the scene followed behind us. I hid my face in embarrassment. I'd never been caught before. I suppose there's a first time for everything. Suddenly we stopped, and I was suddenly thrown to the ground, my cloak torn off in the process. All the objects that were stuffed inside had been scattered. Wiping myself off, I sat up. I found myself in the middle of a very large crowd of Vikings young and old. I even saw a group that looked about my age, a couple of them snickering at my situation. I gritted my teeth angrily at them. Just then, I noticed an area of the crowd parting, as if making a path for someone. Sure enough, I was right - and at this point, very frightened. The man that they called their leader, or the chief of their tribe, stood over me, scratching his long red beard.

"What's the meaning of this?" His voice thundered.

"Stoick," Spitelout began, "I caught this thief stealing supplies from Gobber's shop!"

The Viking chief bent down closer, his eyes locked with mine briefly, squinting, as if to see right into my head and find the answers he wanted, why I was here and what other plans I might've had... not that I had any. I flinched a little, waiting uneasily to see what he would say next.

"What do ye suggest we do with her?" asked the other Viking. He sounded a little too eager to hear the decision of my fate.

Stoick rose back to his full height. There was a sudden hush over the crowd, as he turned to his second in command. "Lock her away, until I can decide on a suitable punishment." And with that, he turned his back and disappeared into the crowd.

"No! Wait!" I begged as I was dragged away.

2. Crime and Punishment

Chapter 2: Crime and Punishment

"Let me go!" I protested. I kicked my legs and swung my fists in an attempt to get free, but to no avail. My captor kept a firm hold on my bodice, not even acknowledging my resistance.

The next thing I knew, we were entering a slightly larger building. Inside, it was dark and damp. A drip of water, or at least what I could only hope was water, fell to my cheek. I looked upward, wiping it off in disgust.

The man stopped in front of a cage, not very large but big enough to hold a medium size human or a small dragon. He opened the barred door, hurling me inside, and just as quickly slammed it shut. "That oughta hold ye!" he grunted, slamming on a padlock. He then walked

over to a rope and pulley, hoisting the cage upward. The movement caused it to rock and swing back and forth, throwing me around inside. I held onto the bars tightly, until it stopped. "Now ye be a good little birdie." Spitelout taunted. I spat down at him in response, hitting him right between the eyes. He stumbled backwards a bit, cursing under his breath as he rubbed his sleeve across his face. I couldn't help but smirk a little. With one eye still closed, he looked up at me once more. "I hope Stoick guts ye! Filthy little wretch!" And with that, he walked off, leaving me alone.

You'd think this was a hopeless situation, but I had a few tricks up my sleeve. Heck, I've been in tougher binds than this. I reached into my bodice, pulling out a small metal clip. Reaching my arm through the bars and gripping the lock, I jammed the clip inside. I twisted and turned the tiny object, over and over again. I could tell this would be time consuming and wasn't completely confident that it would work, since I'd never actually done it before. It was more or less an old wives tale really, though anything was worth a shot.

Seconds soon turned into minutes, and the minutes turned into hours. By this point I had made no progress in my escape. I slumped down in the cage, still turning the clip slowly. Half a day had already gone by and my energy was about spent. To make matters even worse, I was starting to feel hungry again. I finally withdrew the clip, and frustratedly threw it to the ground below. I then furiously punched the inside of the cage causing it, once again, to rock back and forth. I gripped each side with both hands, trying to steady it. I looked up at the rope that was tied to the top of the cage and connected to the pulley... Had they not confiscated my knife, I would have been able to cut myself down ... _of course then, I'd still be stuck in this cage, _I thought. A lot of good that would have done me. Feeling defeated, I leaned my back against the bars, resting my arms over my knees. I wanted to cry, but held it back as I often do. Afterward, I began to feel myself drift off.

I was rudely awakened by the sound of doors banging open and loud, echoing footsteps. I sleepily rubbed my eyes, as I could hear their voices coming closer, as well as one already familiar voice." Oh, Thor!" I complained. "Not this guy again!"

Spitelout stood beneath me once more, and this time he had some of his buddies with him. I knew I was in no position to be sarcastic, but I just couldn't help myself. "If I throw a stick, will you leave?" I snarked, leaning coolly against one side of the cage.

He ignored my comment, and commenced to pulling the rope. The others gathered closer as I made my way downward. He stopped the cage just inches from the floor, and smashed open the lock. He then reached in and grabbed me by the arm, pulling me in with the others. Two of them held me by each arm, as two others marched behind. Spitelout led the way.

Once outside, I winced as the sunlight bombarded my eyes, my vision slowly adjusting. _Where were they dragging me off to now? _I wondered. None of them spoke a word, or even taunted. Instead they seemed very focused and serious about what they were doing. I mean, a little banter would have been nice. If anything, to lessen the tension.

As they marched onward, I began to notice we were leaving the town,

or at least entering the outskirts of town. Not towards the woods, but in the opposite direction, toward the docks. It was there we began to approach a rather large audience. It looked as though the entire village had turned out for this. Whatever was about to happen to me was considered a large event, apparently. _I'm so happy that my possible disemboweling could be entertainment for these people_. I sighed, rolling my eyes, then suddenly feeling queasy by the very thought.

As we made our way through the crowd, they began to step back, creating a pathway all the way down to the docks. I lowered my head, trying not to make further eye contact

They stopped abruptly at the docks. I turned as they did, already imagining myself hurtling through the air and right into the jaws of a hungry shark or two. "A crime has been committedâ€¦." Stoick's voice boomed, rattling me even more than my heart already was. "If there's one act of betrayal -" he spit the word out like gristle - "I detest, it's thievery..." He leaned in my face, looking in my eyes again faster than I could look away. His breath was thick and smelled like a thousand large portions of mutton. "And it will NOT be tolerated in my village!" Note to self: you picked the wrong guy to mess with. Well, not that I'd known - if I had I'd be halfway over the horizon by yesterday. I flinched, squeezing my eyes shut, anticipating whatever would come next, and then he said it... "Tie her to mast!" ... My eyes popped open, what mast was he talking about? I looked around nervously. We turned back toward the ocean, and there at the end of the dock was a small boat, with a mast built into the middle. There was no sail on it, it was just an upright pole. The men forced me on board. Spitelout sneered as he brought down a thick piece of rope, securing my wrists behind the pole and tying me down. "Not so tough now, are ye?" he laughed, dragging his index finger under my chin. I jerked my head away.

"Dad wait!" a voice rang out. A Viking boy, about my age dashed from the crowd to the dock where his father stood. He stopped, catching his breath. "Dad! Y-You can't do this!" he huffed.

"This doesn't concern ye Hiccup." Stoick objected, shoving him aside.

"Come on dad, she's just a kid!" He pressed on. "I-I get the principal here, I do, but don't you think this is a little much?" He gestured towards me and the boat. There was a long silence. He tried his best to stare his father down. I could see Stoick's stern expression starting to soften a bit as he acknowledged his son's words. The boy may have not looked much like a Viking, but he was surly as stubborn as one. Just then, the mighty Viking chief, signaled to his men, "Release her!" he ordered. Spitelout and the others shrugged, confused by the order but did as they were told. I meanwhile, felt like I was about to pass out from shock. None the less, I was greatly appetitive.

The men grabbed my arms once more, roughly hoisting me back onto the dock. Stoick stood in front of me once more, blocking me off with his massive hand. "Not so fast." he rumbled. "Ye may live, but yer not off the hook."

Of course he wasn't just going to let me go, though based on his now, slightly calm demeanor whatever he was thinking couldn't have been

worse than what they had originally planned.

Just then, the Blacksmith from earlier, stood beside him. "Gobber-" he addressed. "Meet yer new assistant."

"What?" both I and the Blacksmith shouted in Unison.

"But, I don't know the first thing about- erm smithery." I rubbed the back of my head, laughing nervously.

"Either ye can work off your debt or be shipped off. Yer only options."

I just nodded unwillingly in agreement. In my old village we had a saying. _"Don't poke the bear, unless you want your face mauled off." _I'd say that certainly applied here.

"Good." Stoick grunted, then turned to walk back up the hill and into town, directing the crowd of villagers to do the same.

3. Blacksmith in Training

Chapter 3: Blacksmith in Training

As relieved as I was that I was no longer about to be executed, I was not exactly thrilled with my new sentence. My skills were in farming, hunting and wilderness survival... I mean, me? Work as a blacksmith? Granted, the only tool I really knew how to use was a hammer. _No, there's no way I could do this! _

It was then I began to plot my escape. I would sneak away that night, after everyone had gone to sleep. My thoughts were suddenly interrupted when I felt a large hand touch my shoulder. I jumped, a bit startled. "I guess that means you'll be coming with me, ay Las?" the blacksmith exclaimed, guiding me along. I was rather surprised by his gentle friendliness.

"Uh, yeah." I nodded.

"Name's Gobber." He quickly reached out a hooked hand. Shocked by its sudden appearance I leaped back a few inches.

"Oh, wow!" I yelped in response. Then, embarrassed, I slowly stepped forward, repeating the gesture. "Uh- sorry, I just-" I paused, clearing my throat and gripping the hook, looking away slightly. "Ingrid, my name is Ingrid."

Gobber placed his good hand on my back, gently guiding me back up the hill. "Not to worry Las. Yer in good hands- well...one, anyway," he assured, waving his hook around jokingly.

As we continued up the hill, I glanced back briefly at the Viking boy who'd saved my life. I would have thanked him then, but I decided it was best to avoid all social contact with him and the other villagers. There was no sense in it.

Gobber brought me back to his shop, or 'smithy' as I learned was the proper term. It was there, he began to show me the basics. He walked me over to a fire pit - er, 'forge'. "Do ye know how to use one of

these?" he asked, gesturing to the large bellows, connected to the exterior.

"Um ... kinda ... probably..." I shrugged. "No, not really."

"Here," he smiled, placing both my hands on the handle, guiding me in repeating up and down motions. It seemed easy enough. He eventually let go, allowing me to do it on my own. The more I pushed, the hotter the coals started to burn.

"There! Now yer, gettin' it!" he encouraged.

This process was turning out to be more tiresome than I figured. It took a little while for the forge to really heat up, and with every push of the bellows, my arms started to feel more like they were about fall off. "How much longer do I need to do this?" I grunted.

"Until it's hot enough," he replied, back turned away as he reached for his tools.

"How can you tell?"

Neither of us paying attention to the growing flames, a hot piece of coal blew out of the forge - and into Gobber's pants. "What the..." He turned his head, seeing his rear end suddenly burst into flames, he dropped his tools and shouted. Grabbing at his pant legs, He danced around, attempting to shake out the piece of coal.

"Oh!" I cringed and searched the room desperately for something to help put it out. Nearby was a bucket of water. Thanking the gods, I grabbed it and tossed its contents over Gobber. Dripping wet, he fell facedown in an exhausted heap. I looked away at the rather large hole in the back of his pants... I don't think I need to say anymore. His face still flat to the floor, he managed to raise one arm, forcing a thumbs up.

"It's hot enough."

Fifteen minutes and a change of pants later, we began our next lesson. 'Hammering' ... finally, a word I was familiar with! Gobber pulled a red hot iron rod from the forge and placed it on top of an anvil in front of me. "Okay, Inrgid, let's see whatcha got!" he said, handing me a large hammer. "I assume ye know how to use one of these?" He smirked, raising an eyebrow.

"Piece of cake!" I boasted, taking the hammer. I held onto the end of the rod closest to me and began, pounding the hammer down on the other end.

"Not so hard. Ye need to start out with gentle taps," he instructed. "Yer shaping the iron, not shattering it!"

I raised the hammer in the air once more. Just as I was bringing it down again, the head slipped off. It flew a short distance, before knocking Gobber in the side of his jaw.

After a trip to the village healer, Gobber returned, the whole left side of his face bandaged.

"Ye know what? Why don't ye just watch this one ... stand over there ... way over there." He pointed to a far corner of the room.

I sighed, backing away, as I watched him pick up an axe head and place it in a large stone vice.

I stopped and leaned against what I thought was a pillar. Feeling the object move under my weight, I gasped, fumbling to catch it before it fell over completely... "Oh , godsâ€¦" I bit down on my knuckles and squeezed my eyes shut as it smashed into a row of crossbows, setting them all off at once.

"Are ye even listening, Ingrid?" Gobber looked up, just in time to see the barrage of arrows flying at him. Gasping, he ducked, missing them all successfully. Relieved, Gobber picked himself up and dusted himself off ... too soon however, as one final, late ejecting arrow burrowed its way into his wood leg. He looked down at it, then back up at me with a blank stare. "I think we're done for today."

The day went on from there, and I spent the rest of it cleaning up my mess. Gobber left for the day, after showing me where I'd be sleeping. For the time being, the smithy was my new home. Well, it was still better then sleeping in a cage.

I swept the floor, unaware of the figure standing in the open door way. "Uh, hi there," a voice spoke. I turned around to see the brown haired Viking boy. "Oh, hey." I replied hesitantly and resumed sweeping.

"S-so, how goes the assistant thing?"

"Okay, I guess."

There was an awkward silence for a moment. I didn't want to seem rude, but at the same time I wasn't exactly in the mood for small talk. He then began to approach me, holding a sword.

"Well, I can see you're busy, so I'll just drop this off and be out of your hair."

The second he said that, my mind went blank. Finally, I looked up and faced him.

"Drop off?"

"Yeah..." He lifted the weapon toward me, with a grunt. "It just needs a little sharpening is all."

"Well, Gobber's gone for the day so..." I trailed off, looking away for a moment, then down at the sword in his hands. "You know, actually ... I can probably help you with that."

"Oh, it's okay ... I don't expect you to ... I mean, your first day on the job and all."

I took the sword, and carried it to the grinder, then, with much force, lifted the blade up and against the stone surface. "Okay," I huffed. "How did he do this again?"

"You're doing that wrong," the boy corrected, stepping forward.

"Here, I'll show you." He took the sword out of my hands and set it down, then pulled on a handle on the side of the grinder, making it turn. He continued this motion a few times before the grinder gained enough force to move on its own. He then proceeded to lift the sword once more, holding it in place. "Yeah, I use to work here as Gobber's apprentice." He paused, retracting the sword, then blew excess dust from the blade. "So, yeah... I'm pretty familiar with the equipment."

"Really?" I replied sarcastically. "Well, good for you." Quite frankly, he was starting to get under my skin. I turned my back and wandered over to a nearby table. There, I picked up some tools and fiddled around, pretending to be busy in hopes that we would leave. But ... no, he just kept standing there.

"Okay, so is that it?"

There was another silence before he finally answered. "Uh, yeah." he said, a bit of disappointment in his tone. Of course, I knew just what he was expecting to hear me say, and for whatever reason, I just couldn't say it. Those two little words. I mean, was it really that hard? For me, yes. Not because I didn't want to, but because I simply wasn't great with any social situation.

"Well, see yah around."

I dropped the tools in my hand and let out an audible and exasperated sigh. Then, turning around, leaning my back against the table's edge, I faced the open door and glanced out at the late afternoon sky. Thank Odin it was nearly nightfall. In just a matter of hours, I would be free of this place.

4. Attempt to Escape

Chapter 4: Attempt to Escape

Later that night, once I was certain the entire village was asleep, I quietly gathered up as much food and provisions as I could carry, and then headed for the docks. I spotted the boat they had planned to use to ship me off. It would have to do. I grabbed a couple of oars and tossed my things aboard before stepping in.

With my knife, which I was able to sneak back from Spitelout earlier that day ... don't ask me how ... I started to cut through the rope that was keeping the boat tied ashore.

"You're not by any chance trying to skip town are you?"

Great! I thought, once more hearing the sound of his voice. At least it was him and not one of the others.

"Don't worry about it, go back home kid!" I whispered harshly.

"Look, you really shouldn't do this, okay? My dad will find out and when he does, he'll come searching for you ... and when he find's you he'lll-"

"Which is why I'll be long gone by the time he does find

out!"

"Look, if it's the blacksmith thing ... I can help you with that!"

"You want to help? Then help me get off this island!"

He stood there silently for a moment, looking down at me then threw his arms down at his sides, letting out a frustrated sigh. "You're putting me in a very awkward position here!"

He hopped down from the dock and knelt beside the boat. As I watched him struggle to untie the rope, I couldn't help glancing down at his prosthetic leg. I didn't notice it earlier, not that I was paying attention. "So-" I began, about to ask him how it happened. As his eyes met my own, I paused and instead choked out a different response, "Thanks."

"One more thing." He smirked, glancing down at my neatly wrapped cloak nestled on the floor of the boat. "I'm already getting busted for helping you escape. I'd rather not add accomplice to theft to the list."

I rolled my eyes, and reached down. "Fine, here!" I uttered, tossing him the cloak. "I don't need that crap anyway!"

Sitting down, I grabbed the oars. "Take it easy, kid." I waved one hand in a salute, and then proceeded to row away.

As I inched further out, I watched him stagger uphill from the dock. He stopped and turned once more to face me. It was difficult to tell through the thin layer of fog, but I could see his expression. He seemed ... distraught. It was as if he didn't want to see me leave for whatever reason. Just then, he lifted his head, pointing upward. Confused, I squinted at him, shaking my head. He started to yell something, but I was unable to hear as I was already too far away.

A cold wind began to blow over me, and low thunderous rumbles echoed from above. I turned my head to see the dark clouds that had suddenly swallowed up the sky, as flashes of lightning erupted from them. Though I could see the signs of an obvious storm brewing, I pressed on. I admit, it was a stupid decision on my part, but I sure as hell didn't want to spend another day stuck in that oddball village.

The waves below me grew bigger and more violent. The little boat was apparently not made to withstand much motion ... of course, I should have figured. The wind had begun to pick up and droplets of rain poured down ... at this point, I debated on perhaps heading back to shore. I started to retreat, turning the boat back in the opposite direction. It was too late however, as the waves were overpowering my every movement. In a final attempt to turn the boat, one of the oars had broken right out of my hand, and was quickly floating out of my reach. Standing up, slowly I reached out to retrieve it, not seeing the large wave that was about to crash down on top of me, full force.

Before I knew it, I felt myself being pulled down, and swept away by the current. With every bit of strength I could muster, I fought my way to the surface. The boat was now lost by this point, and my only hope now was to swim... easier said than done. Tossed around by one

wave, and then another, it was all I could do to keep my head above water. Then, in one final splash, I was finally dragged under. The last thing I could remember, before losing consciousness, was the faint sound of someone's voice, crying out my name. Anything after that, I can only recall in small fragments, as I briefly fell in and out of consciousness. Even then, all I could make out was a fuzzy, strangely shaped dark figure. It seemed almost, half human and half beast. Maybe it was a hallucination brought on by swallowing too much sea water ... all I know, was that by the grace of the gods, I did not die that night.

I awoke groggily to the warmth of a crackling fire. The side of my head throbbed with a stinging sensation. Lying there, waiting for my vision to adjust I tried to remember the events of the last few hours. Once the numbness in the rest of my body began to fade, I could feel that I had been wrapped up in something. I picked my head up slightly to see that it had been my cloak, and then just as quickly I dropped my head again, cringing once more from the pain. Finally, bringing one arm up to feel the wound that pierced the area above my temple, though it wasn't quite as deep as it felt. I brought my hand back to see the bits of blood that came off onto my fingertips.

"Easy!" I suddenly heard someone say. He came around, holding something in his hand. "That's two you owe me," he joked, bringing a piece of cloth down to dab the wound on my head.

"It's you...", I weakly moaned. "What ... happened?"

"Well, let's see ... yooooou, tried to escape ... made me help you against my will and proceeded to stupidly row right into a storm where you nearly drowned, hit some rocks and ended up with that nasty cut there."

"Wait- you were the one who saved me?" Truth be told, I was a bit shocked to say the least. I mean, this scrawny Viking kid? "No, seriously..." I smirked.

"Well...", he started to answer, when a large, shadowy figure appeared behind him.

I jolted to my feet, and grabbed for my knife. "Look out!" I screamed, pushing him out of the way and stood before the dark creature as it stepped into the light. The beast appeared before me in clear view... It was a dragon, unlike any I'd ever seen. It looked down at my weapon, then reared its head and bared its fangs. I stumbled a bit in my stance, still feeling a bit woozy, but ready to plunge my knife into its heart.

"NO, WAIT!" The boy protested, jumping in front of the dragon. He then turned to it, waving it away "Go on home bud, I got it covered."

I watched in disbelief as the dragon withdrew, and retreated, after looking back at me with a final low growl. Hiccup grabbed me before I could run after it.

"Are you insane? You're letting it escape?" I argued. "What's the matter with you?"

"ME? Seems to me, you're the one with the issues here, and would you mind lowering your voice before you wake up the entire island?"

"Yeah, I'd say it's too late for that." A new voice was heard, this time belonging to a female. We both turned to see a blonde girl, though thankfully no one else.

"Astrid!"

"What's going on here?" She brought a hand up to his shoulder, and then wiped it on her own clothing. "Hiccup, you're soaked."

"Uh, yeah ... I was just showing Ingrid here around the village and we decided to go for a little swim."

"In the middle of the night?" Astrid raised an eyebrow.

Neither of us said a word, he nudged me, prompting me to play along, as I did so nodding along with him. Judging by the look on the other's face, she wasn't too convinced by the lie. After staring me down, her gaze moved over to Hiccup. "Okay, well, you and I are gonna talk - but right now, it's late and some of us need eight hours."

"Yeah, good idea." Hiccup nodded, stretching out his arms and forcing a yawn. "In fact-" he turned to me, "we should ALL be heading back to the village for a goodnight sleep." ... in other words, let's head back before we attract anymore unwanted attention.

Well, so much for that, I thought.

5. A New Day and New Surprises

Chapter 5: A New Day and New Surprises

"Rise and shine, lass!" Gobber barged in cheerfully, opening all the doors and windows. I responded to the sudden burst of light, pulling the covers up over my face.

"What time is it?" I groaned.

"Time to get to work!" He paused, abruptly yanking the covers away. "Come on now, these axes aren't gonna sharpen themselves!"

"Fine, fine ... I'm up," I complained, pulling myself up to a sit. My body ached and my head felt like it had been pounded on by Thor's hammer. The events from the night before, by this point were reduced to a faded memory. I began to wonder if it had all been a dream, until-

"So, word around the village is that ye and Hiccup had a little fun at the docks last night?"

"What? No... I mean, how did-"

"Aye, it's a small village. Gossip travels fast."

Astrid! I thought, pounding my head against the wall. Then quickly

and calmly, I denied.

"Yeah well, there's nothing to gossip about because nothing happened." I picked up an axe and began sharpening. "Doesn't anyone in this town have anything better to do?"

"Mind handing me those pliers over there?" Gobber gestured over to a table close by. I set the axe down, and picked them up, walking them over.

"Very little since the dragons got tamed."

On the way to the grinder, I stopped in my tracks.
"Seriously?"

"Aye."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing, I mean- "Tame dragons?" I laughed. "There's no such thing. The only good dragon is a dead dragon." I resumed, picking up the axe and waving it in a chopping motion.

"Nah, ye'll learn to love 'em."

"I seriously doubt that." I stopped sharpening and sighed. "I think I need some air." I dropped the axe into a pile and trudged toward the door.

"Alright, but don't be too long. Ye got a lot of chores to do." I heard him say as I stepped out.

"Whatever," I muttered.

As I walked through the village plaza, I passed families and large groups of Vikings; men, women and children. Beside each one, amazingly, was a tame dragon. Dragons of all shapes, sizes, and breeds... Gronkles, Nadders, Nightmares, Terrors- I even spotted a BoneKnapper or two. All of them, being treated like pets. How could this have been? Dragon's weren't sweet, they weren't obedient and they certainly couldn't be housebroken ... though they were known to break houses, which I can say from personal experience. In any case, they were vicious, dangerous beasts. These people were either suicidal morons, or they knew something I didn't.

Shaking my head, I walked faster, quickly separating myself from this sickening display.

"Oof!" I suddenly stopped, running face forward into massive green leg. Doubling back, I looked up in horror at the two Zippleback heads that angrily descended, one hissing and the other snapping its jaws.

"What do YOU want?"

I whipped my head around to see two slouching twin Vikings approaching me from either side. Trying to back away, I bumped into another Viking teen. He was much brawnier, not to mention uglier. I turned around to face him, startled, as he grinned and flexed his arms. "What's the matter, babe, too much Viking for you?" Just behind him was a Monstrous Nightmare ... the very sight of which made me

tremble. I responded, shoving the larger Viking boy out of my way and quickly retreating in the opposite direction.

"Ingrid!" Hiccup called as I ran past him. He raced alongside me, seemingly confused by my behavior. "Wait up!" He then moved ahead, blocking my path. I stopped as he did, nearly tumbling forward.

"What's going on?" he asked, catching his breath.

"I should be asking you the same thing!"

"Um ... I'm sorry?"

"The dragons!"

"Yeeah ... dragons..." Hiccup nodded, nervously rubbing the back of his neck. He looked at me as if I were a mental patient. "I do see them!"

"But â€" ! Why â€" ? How â€" are you not freaked out by this?" Suddenly, I felt a rough nudge to my back. The Night Fury swept past me, narrowing his green eyes. He settled down beside Hiccup and snorted.

"It's a long story."

"Uh-huh." I replied, blankly staring at the black dragon, then shaking my head I focused my attention back to Hiccup. "- and another thing, apparently word has gotten out about last night's little incident-"

"I know!" Hiccup interrupted, "I straightened Astrid out about the whole thing, and don't worry. Nobody knows anything about you trying to escape. If anyone asks, you fell off the docks."

"Okay, good ... and your dad?"

Just as I had asked that, I saw his mammoth shadow looming over me from behind, then the feeling of his large hand, cupped over my shoulder. I didn't turn around, I was too afraid.

"A word?" he spoke, though he didn't sound nearly as threatening as he did during our first encounter, he still sounded serious. I gulped, then turned and nodded.

"Ye too, Son," he added, gesturing for Hiccup to follow.

We were lead into the mead hall, also known as the "Great Hall", as the space had been used for multiple purposes.

"You know, I should really be heading back to the smithy."

"Not to worry, this won't take long." Stoick held the doors open, allowing me to enter first. The hall was for the moment, completely vacant.

Chapter 6: A Change of Heart

"Sit." Stoick held his open palm toward one of the many tables. Reluctantly, I obliged.

Stoick sat just across from me, while Hiccup stood at the end of the table, along with Toothless. We exchanged glances; I could tell he was thinking the same thing I was - Stoick knew. The thing however, was that he seemed unusually calm.

"So...", he began, rubbing his hands together, "Ingrid, is it?"

"Yes sir. Ingrid Halstein."

"I see. And where do ye hail from," he paused, with a small smirk. "-Ingrid Halstein?"

"Um, well ... I'm from Derby."

"Interesting, I'm not sure I'm familiar with that island."

"Well, it's not really an island, it's just a small settlement on Mount Villainy."

"Mount Villainy?" Hiccup cocked his head. "I didn't think anyone lived there?"

"As far as I know, we were the only ones."

"Mmmhm," Stoick replied, stroking his beard.

"With all due respect sir, why are you suddenly so interested?"

"Because, I make it a point to know everyone who enters my village. If ye wish to remain here, ye will answer my every question. Understood?"

"Fair enough."

"So then, what brings ye to Berk?"

"Conditions of circumstance." I looked down at the table and sighed, slowly tracing my finger along its rough wooden surface.

"I see." The chief cleared his throat. Maybe I was imagining it, but he almost seemed as uncomfortable as I was, which, in a weird way, made this conversation feel a little less awkward. "Go on."

At that moment, I quietly thought up an excuse to get out of this. Reminiscing over my shattered past was the last thing I wanted to get into. "Look, Gobber's probably wondering where I ran off to," I stood up, taking a few steps backwards, "so I should be-"

"Sit back down!" Stoick raised his voice, causing an eerie echo.

I bit down on my lip, then proceeded to obey. Hiccup finally took a seat beside his father, both leaning in, waiting eagerly for my response. I glanced over at Toothless, who remained quietly at the end of the table. He held up one of his barrel shaped paws and

splaying his claws, as if he was threatening to rip me to shreds if I didn't cooperate. _This isn't a friendly chat_, I thought, grumbling under my breath, _it's an interrogation. _

"Okay, fine." I took a breath, "I left my village five or so months ago, after my parents were killed."

"Killed?" Stoick repeated, leaning closer.

"By a dragon." I looked away once more, biting down on my lip, fighting off the urge to cry. After I set out on my own, I made it a rule... to be an efficient hunter, I would never fall victim to my own emotions, and I'd sooner shed my own blood than shed a single tear- yeah, dramatic I know, but it's what's held me together and do my best to abide by those rules. Besides, blubbering like a baby never helped anyone.

"I'm sorry, can I get some water or something? My um â€¦ throat's a little dry," I stalled, clearing my throat. Hiccup left the table and returned with three full mugs.

"Thanks." I picked mine up, and took a few gulps.

The two stared at me silently, their eyes wide with sympathy and intrigue. I could feel my stomach churning and a dry lump forming in my throat. Unfortunately, my mug was now totally empty.

"What kind of dragon?" Hiccup broke the silence.

"A Monstrous Nightmare," I answered, now trying not to throw up. The very mention made me feel even more nauseous. "Look, I really can't talk about this. I'm sure you wouldn't even understand."

"Actually," Stoick began defensively, glancing at Hiccup, then back at me, "we do." He bowed his head sadly. It didn't take me long to figure out what he was thinking. Apparently, it was something we had in common, as it was later explained.

"I'm sorry."

"Nevermind." He smiled warmly. "Here, we prefer not to dwell on the past. Instead we remember and celebrate the memories of those we've lost and focus on the future." Standing up, he placed his hands on my shoulders and looked down at me with smiling eyes, as if I was one of his own. It was almost as if the last couple days never happened.

I glared at him, confused by his sudden change of heart. "No offense sir, but why are you suddenly being soâ€¦nice to me?"

"Well, I may look tough on the outside, but as Hiccup's discovered - and now, ye as well - inside, I've got quite a heart, too. And I've realized that all ye need is a chance. I gave my son one, and no sense in me not giving ye one too. Berk's had plenty of people who started out as intruders, more or less. But now they're hardworking, upstanding men and women. Ye could be one of those women."

At this point, there was no stopping the tears. As my eyes visibly welled up I found myself doing the unthinkable: throwing my arms around Stoick and burying my face into his chest, completely overwhelmed by my own emotions. All I could think about was the fact

that I hadn't felt this much warmth since my parents, and how much I missed that feeling.

Stoick cleared his throat, gently pushing me away but still kept a firm hold on my shoulders.

"Yes, wellâ€”the smithy isn't the most comfortable place to sleep, I'm sure. Perhaps ye can stay with Hiccup and I- that is, until more permanent arrangements can be made."

"What do yah say, Ingrid?" Hiccup stood up, walking over to us.

"Well Iâ€”, " I was interrupted by Toothless who practically leaped over Hiccup, then began playfully nudging and licking my cheek despite my best efforts to push him off me. "T-Toothless!" I laughed, wiping dragon slobber from my face.

End
file.